

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for a user to set up an aesthetically appealing personal portal screen of bookmarked web sites that are iconic, movable and accessible, for a personal computer forming part of a computer system coupled to a network, the personal computer having an operating system that enables a web browser to locate and access a web site, comprising:

loading a system software while at a web site maintained by the computer system in order to access a blank personal portal screen, said system software including a system toolbar that is maintained on a computer screen during navigation throughout the World Wide Web,

for each visited web site that the user desires to import into the personal portal screen as a favorite web site,

when a visual cue on a system tool bar indicates the visited web site is a merchant partner, clicking on an icon generator function on the system toolbar, said clicking opening a window displaying a merchant partner logo and prompting the user to confirm the addition of the visited web site of the merchant partner to the personal portal screen thereby automatically transmitting the merchant partner logo to the personal portal screen so that the merchant partner logo can function as a link to the favorite merchant partner web site,

when the visual cue on the system tool bar indicates the visited web site is not a merchant partner, clicking on the icon generator function on the system tool bar, said clicking automatically opening up the three-part selection window for the selection of a topic and a visual image and for designating a name, selecting a topic in one part of the selection window, a visual image in a

second part of the selection window and designating a name in a third part of the selection window, and simultaneously confirming the selection of the topic and visual image and the designation of the name after being prompted to do so and in so doing transmitting the selected topic and visual image and name to the personal portal screen, wherein the selected visual image and/or designated name appearing on the personal portal screen on the personal computer functions as a link to the favorite web site and

displaying all of the visual images and/or merchant partner logos on a single page to form the personal portal screen of favorite web sites and favorite advertised web sites.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said loading is a downloading from a web site maintained by a system provider.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein a visited web site that is a merchant partner can also be imported into the personal portal screen by placing a cursor on a non-button portion of the system toolbar and dragging the cursor into a merchant partner screen, said dragging causing the merchant partner screen to disappear and be replaced with the personal portal screen, wherein upon letting go of the cursor a merchant partner logo appears briefly in the personal portal screen followed by a reappearance of the merchant partner screen

4. The method of claim 3, wherein a non-merchant partner can also be imported into the personal portal screen by placing a cursor on a non-button portion of the system toolbar and dragging the cursor into a non-merchant partner screen, said dragging causing the merchant

partner screen to disappear and be replaced with the personal portal screen, wherein upon letting go of the cursor a default logo appears briefly in the personal portal screen followed by a reappearance of the non-merchant partner screen

5. A method for a user to set up an aesthetically appealing personal portal screen of bookmarked web sites that are iconic, movable and accessible, for a personal computer forming part of a computer system coupled to a network, the personal computer having an operating system that enables a web browser to locate and access a web site, comprising:

loading a system software while at a web site maintained by the computer system in order to access a blank personal portal screen, said system software including a system toolbar that is maintained on a computer screen during navigation throughout the World Wide Web,

for each visited web site that the user desires to import into the personal portal screen as a favorite web site,

when a visual cue on a system tool bar indicates the visited web site is a merchant partner, clicking on an icon generator function on the system toolbar, said clicking opening a window displaying a merchant partner logo and prompting the user to confirm the addition of the visited web site of the merchant partner to the personal portal screen thereby automatically transmitting the merchant partner logo to the personal portal screen so that the merchant partner logo can function as a link to the favorite merchant partner web site,

when the visual cue on the system tool bar indicates the visited web site is not a merchant partner, clicking on the icon generator function on the system tool bar, said clicking automatically opening up the three-part selection window for the selection of a topic and a visual image and for

designating a name, selecting a topic in one part of the selection window, a visual image in a second part of the selection window and designating a name in a third part of the selection window, and simultaneously confirming the selection of the topic and visual image and the designation of the name after being prompted to do so and in so doing transmitting the selected topic and visual image and name to the personal portal screen, wherein the selected visual image and/or designated name appearing on the personal portal screen on the personal computer functions as a link to the favorite web site and

for each web site that the user desires to import into the personal portal screen as a favorite advertising web site,

clicking on an advertising banner for a favorite advertised web site while the advertising banner is located in an advertising strip of the personal portal screen and transmitting an advertiser's logo from the advertising banner to a general area of the personal portal screen wherein the advertiser's logo functions as a link to the favorite advertised web site.

clicking on an advertising banner for a favorite advertised web site while the advertising banner is located on a different web site and transmitting an advertiser's logo from the advertising banner to the personal portal screen wherein the advertiser's logo functions as a link to the favorite advertised web site,

displaying all of the visual images, merchant partner logos and/or advertising banners on a single page to form the personal portal screen of favorite web sites and favorite advertised web sites.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein transmitting means dragging.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein a visited web site that is a merchant partner can also be imported into the personal portal screen by placing a cursor on a non-button portion of the system toolbar and dragging the cursor into a merchant partner screen, said dragging causing the merchant partner screen to disappear and be replaced with the personal portal screen, wherein upon letting go of the cursor a merchant partner logo appears briefly in the personal portal screen followed by a reappearance of the merchant partner screen.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein a non-merchant partner can also be imported into the personal portal screen by placing a cursor on a non-button portion of the system toolbar and dragging the cursor into a non-merchant partner screen, said dragging causing the merchant partner screen to disappear and be replaced with the personal portal screen, wherein upon letting go of the cursor a default logo appears briefly in the personal portal screen followed by a reappearance of the non-merchant partner screen.

9. The method of claim 5, wherein an advertising banner positioned on a different web site briefly displays a message that the owner of the banner is a partner of the computer system when the user places a cursor over the banner.

10. The method of claim 5, wherein an advertising banner positioned on a different web site briefly displays a message that the owner of the advertising banner is a partner of the computer system when the user places a cursor over the banner and wherein an advertising banner positioned in the advertising strip briefly displays a message that the owner of the advertising

banner is a partner of the computer system when the user places a cursor over the banner.

11. The method of claim 5, wherein an advertiser's logo that has been dragged into the general area of the personal portal screen of the computer system from the advertising strip of the personal portal screen contains a link mail that briefly displays marketing information from the owner of the advertising banner when a user places a cursor over the advertising banner.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the link mail message can be displayed in an expanded format and wherein the link mail message can be forwarded to a recipient of electronic mail.

13. The method of claim 5, wherein an advertiser's logo that has been dragged into the general area of the personal portal screen of the computer system from the advertising strip of the personal portal screen contains a link mail that briefly displays marketing information from the owner of the advertising banner when a user places a cursor over the advertiser's logo and wherein an advertiser's logo that has been dragged into the personal portal screen from a different web site contains a link mail that briefly displays marketing information from the owner of the advertiser's logo when a user places a cursor over the advertiser's logo.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the link mail can be displayed in an expanded format and wherein the link mail message can be forwarded to a recipient of electronic mail.

15. A computer system using a personal computer coupled to a global communications network, said personal computer having an operating system enabling a web browser to locate and access a web site, wherein the computer system allows the personal computer to aesthetically create and allow access in an aesthetically appealing way to a personal portal screen of icons having links to as many favorite web sites as is desired, comprising:

a system computer that maintains a system web site accessible by the personal computer, said system computer receiving mail from advertisers,
computer software including

a. display structure for displaying to a user a personal portal screen of visual images that are movable across a computer screen, said display structure including access structure for a user at a web site of the system computer to access a blank personal portal screen by downloading a system software that includes a system toolbar;

b. icon generator structure for generating icons that function as links to favorite web sites, said icon generating structure including an icon generating button and including a visual cue button that signals to a user whether a visited web site is a merchant partner;

c. visual cue structure that displays a visual cue on the system toolbar to indicate whether a visited web site is a merchant partner or a non-merchant partner;

d. dialog box structure for creating icons associated with visited web sites owned by non-merchant partners, said dialog box structure including topic selection substructure for opening up a first selection window of topics and selecting a topic from the first selection window, visual image selection substructure for opening up a second selection window of visual images and selecting a visual image from the second selection window, and naming substructure for naming

the favorite web site after being prompted to do so;

e. confirmation structure for confirming the selection of the topic, visual image and name, after being prompted to do so and transmitting the selected visual image and name to the system computer, forming a basis for the personal portal screen displayed on the personal computer, wherein the selected visual image functions as a link to the favorite web site.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein connected to the selected visual image is a link mail structure that can receive marketing information in a form of a link mail sent from the favorite web site of a merchant partner and can display said link mail when a cursor is placed over the selected visual image.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the link mail structure has notification structure to notify a user that said link mail structure received a link mail, said notification structure displaying a small visual symbol and wherein the link mail structure can receive updated marketing information periodically.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein the link mail structure can display the marketing information in a link mail in an expanded format and can forward the link marketing information to another address on the Internet

19. The system of claim 15, wherein the dialog box structure is a three-part dialog box structure.

20. The system of claim 15, wherein said system also includes transmission structure for transmitting an advertiser's logo for a favorite advertised web site to the personal portal screen when a user clicks on and drags the advertising banner located on a visited web site to the personal portal screen wherein the advertising banner functions as a link to the favorite advertised web site.

21. The system of claim 20, wherein the transmission structure includes advertising strip structure for allowing banners to appear as advertisements in a designated strip of space on the personal portal screen and includes advertiser logo transfer structure for transferring an advertiser's logo located in the designated strip to a portion of the personal portal screen containing the icons that function as links to favorite web sites and favorite advertising web sites.

22. The system of claim 20, wherein connected to the selected visual image is a link mail structure that can receive marketing information in a form of a link mail sent from the favorite web site of a merchant partner and can display said link mail when a cursor is placed over the selected visual image.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein the link mail structure has notification structure to notify a user that said link mail structure received a link mail, said notification structure displaying a small visual symbol, and wherein the link mail structure can receive updated marketing information periodically.

24. The system of claim 22, wherein the link mail structure can display the marketing information in a link mail in an expanded format and can forward the link marketing information to another address on the Internet.

25. The system of claim 20, wherein the dialog box structure is a three-part dialog box structure.

26. The system of claim 15, wherein said system also includes

(a) an aesthetically appealing personal portal screen of icons wherein said icons function as links to as many favorite web sites as is desired, said icons being movable across the personal portal screen while a user is connected to the global communications network and

(b) a personal computer having an operating system that enables a web browser to locate and access a web site.

27. The system of claim 26, wherein movable means draggable.

28. The system of claim 26, wherein the dialog box structure is a three-part dialog box structure.

29. Computer software using a personal computer coupled to a global communications network, said personal computer having an operating system enabling a web browser to locate and access a web site, wherein the computer software allows the personal computer to

aesthetically create and allow access in an aesthetically appealing way to a personal portal screen of icons having links to as many favorite web sites as is desired, said personal computer interacting with a system computer that maintains a system web site accessible by the personal computer, said system computer receiving mail from advertisers, said computer software comprising:

a. display structure for displaying to a user a personal portal screen of visual images that are movable across a computer screen, said display structure including access structure for a user at a web site of the system computer to access a blank personal portal screen by downloading a system software that includes a system toolbar;

b. icon generator structure for generating icons that function as links to favorite web sites, said icon generating structure including an icon generating button and including a visual cue button that signals to a user whether a visited web site is a merchant partner;

c. visual cue structure that displays a visual cue on the system toolbar to indicate whether a visited web site is a merchant partner or a non-merchant partner;

d. dialog box structure for creating icons associated with visited web sites owned by non-merchant partners, said dialog box structure including topic selection substructure for opening up a first selection window of topics and selecting a topic from the first selection window, visual image selection substructure for opening up a second selection window of visual images and selecting a visual image from the second selection window, and naming substructure for naming the favorite web site after being prompted to do so;

e. confirmation structure for confirming the selection of the topic, visual image and name, after being prompted to do so and transmitting the selected visual image and name to the system

computer, forming a basis for the personal portal screen displayed on the personal computer, wherein the selected visual image functions as a link to the favorite web site.

30. The system of claim 29, wherein connected to a selected visual image of a merchant partner is a link mail structure that can receive marketing information in a form of a link mail sent from the favorite web site and can display said link mail when a cursor is placed over the selected visual image.

31. The system of claim 30, wherein the link mail structure has notification structure to notify a user that said link mail structure received a link mail, said notification structure displaying a small visual symbol and wherein the link mail structure can receive updated marketing information periodically.

32. The system of claim 31, wherein the link mail structure can display the marketing information in a link mail in an expanded format and can forward the link marketing information to another address on the Internet

33. The system of claim 29, wherein the dialog box structure is a three-part dialog box structure.

34. The system of claim 29, wherein said system also includes transmission structure for transmitting an advertising banner for a favorite advertised web site to the personal portal screen

when a user clicks on and drags the advertising banner located on a visited web site to the personal portal screen wherein the advertising banner functions as a link to the favorite advertised web site.

35. The system of claim 34, wherein the transmission structure includes advertising strip structure for allowing banners to appear as advertisements in a designated strip of space on the personal portal screen and includes advertiser logo transfer structure for transferring advertisers' logos located in the designated strip to a portion of the personal portal screen containing the icons that function as links to favorite web sites and favorite advertising web sites.

36. The system of claim 34, wherein connected to the selected visual image is a link mail structure that can receive marketing information in a form of a link mail sent from the favorite web site of a merchant partner and can display said link mail when a cursor is placed over the selected visual image.

37. The system of claim 36, wherein the link mail structure has notification structure to notify a user that said link mail structure received a link mail, said notification structure displaying a small visual symbol, and wherein the link mail structure can receive updated marketing information periodically.

38. The system of claim 36, wherein the link mail structure can display the marketing information in a link mail in an expanded format and can forward the link marketing information

to another address on the Internet.

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39. The system of claim 34, wherein the dialog box structure is a three-part dialog box structure.